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THE HISTORY OF MISSOURI'S STATE PARK SYSTEM



MISSOURI DEPARTMENT
OF NATURAL RESOURCES
Division of State Parks

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The naturalist program in state parks began in 1937.

THE HISTORY OF MISSOURI'S STATE PARK SYSTEM

Missouri's state park system includes some of the strongest images of the state's people, places and events. Missourians identify with their prominent sons, such as Thomas Hart Benton, and with the places that shaped the state's history, such as the first Missouri State Capitol; they recognize Missouri's outstanding beauty in Elephant Rocks, Ha Ha Tonka and Onondaga Cave; and they remember spending time with their families at places such as Johnson's Shut-Ins or Pomme de Terre Lake.

These images distinctly identify Missouri and provide the central theme for what has been recognized as one of our nation's finest state park systems.

Origin of the Missouri State Park System

The development of this park system is a rich part of our state's heritage. Public discussions that led to the establishment of Missouri's state park system began around the turn of the century.

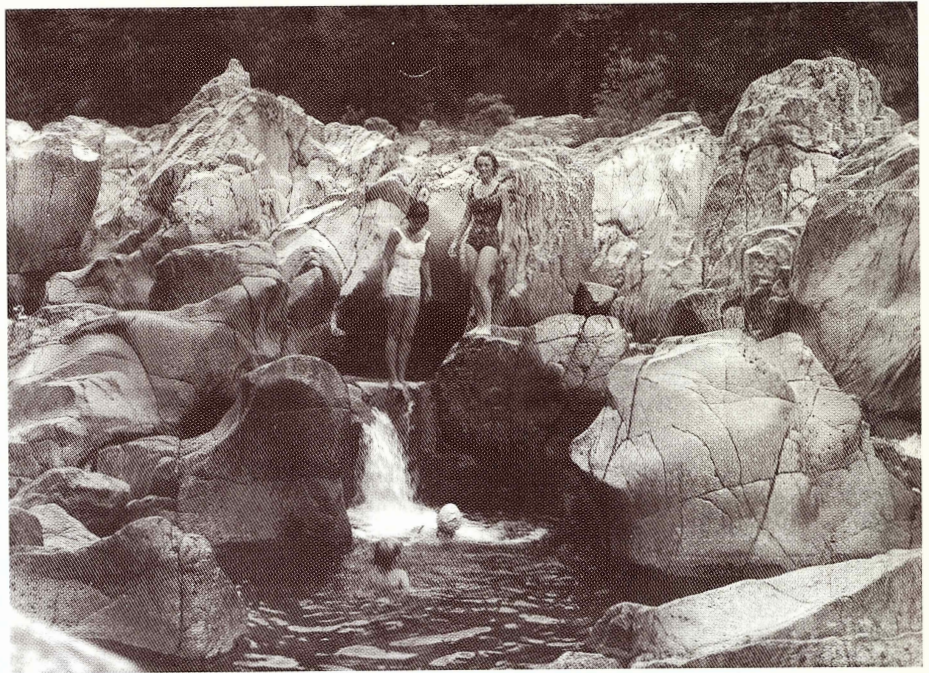
After encouragement from many citizens, state legislators introduced a bill in the Missouri General Assembly in 1907 that would establish a state park system. Although the bill did not pass, interest continued and in 1914, a committee of six senators traveled four days by train, automobile, wagon and foot, evaluating proposed sites to be purchased and developed for state parks. One of these sites was what is now Ha Ha Tonka State Park.

These efforts to establish a state park system were some of the earliest in the country; however, without legislation authorizing funds for acquisition of state park land, the first state park purchase would have to wait.

Many other states also were beginning to feel the demand for recreational areas, and the cry to preserve outstanding natural lands at the state level was being heard throughout the country. In 1916, the National Park Service was created to administer national sites and it promised guidance and assistance in helping establish state park systems. The model of the National Park Service proved to be a good one.

Purchase of State Parks

In 1917, the Missouri legislature acknowledged the need for public recreation areas and passed a law establishing a state park fund, using revenue from the fish and game department. With the fund established, the fish and game department became responsible for the parks once they were acquired. In 1923, the state acquired the historic Arrow Rock Tavern. However, it was not until 1924 that



Johnson's Shut-Ins State Park, 1950s

the first state park tracts were secured. On Oct. 17, 1924, Big Spring State Park became the first Missouri state park. That park, Alley Spring State Park and Round Spring State Park later were recognized as being nationally significant and became part of the National Park Service's Ozark National Scenic Riverways.

By the end of 1925, the state park system had grown to eight areas with a total of 23,244 acres. That same year, the legislature increased the revenue to support the growing state park system. In 1928, the dedication of Meramec State Park drew more than 10,000 visitors; there were more than 400,000 visitors statewide during the summer of 1929, due substantially to new and better highways throughout the state.

As the system grew in size and number, the public showed an even greater interest in state parks. In addition to enjoying the recreational areas available, many Missourians began to express a desire to preserve portions of their state's most outstanding natural landscapes as well as places important to the history of the state and its people. The mission of the state park system was firmly established during these early years. This mission is to preserve and interpret the finest examples of Missouri's natural landscapes; to preserve and interpret the finest examples of Missouri's cultural landmarks; and to provide healthy and enjoyable outdoor recreation opportunities for all Missourians and visitors to Missouri.

By 1932, Missouri had a total of 18 state parks. Missourians showed their endorsements of the state park system not only through the rising attendance figures, but also through donation of Roaring River, Van Meter and Washington state parks.

Civilian Conservation Corps

In the 1930s, the Missouri state park system went through its most significant period of change and development. Beginning in 1933, under the direction of President Franklin Roosevelt, Congress authorized many federal public works programs to help alleviate the unemployment problem. The program that meant the most to Missouri's state park system was the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), an organization providing jobs for young men between the ages of 18 and 25.

By 1934, some 4,000 men were employed in Missouri to complete both conservation and construction work in national and state forests and state parks. Projects ranged from construction of dining lodges, picnic shelters, cabins and campgrounds to installation of sewer lines. Special attention was given to "conservation of the natural beauty with as little molestation by man as possible." Only land necessary for the park facilities was cleared.

...service expertly supervised the program, and the quality of the construction was exceptional. The pride these men took in their work still is evident in our state park system today. In fact, in 1985, most of the CCC work including 247 buildings and 95 structures in the Missouri state park system were included in the only nomination of its kind to the National Register of Historic Places.

State Park Board, 1937 - 1974

In 1937, the management of state parks was separated from the state fish and game department and was placed under the supervision of a new Missouri State Park Board. This was done for two purposes — first, to find a separate source of revenue for the system without using the fish and game revenues, and second, to clarify and separate the operation of state parks from the management of Missouri's fish, forests and game. Twelve years after its first purchase, the state park system was recognized as a separate and distinct use of state-owned public land in Missouri.

The rapidly expanding state park system soon was faced with a critical shortage of funds. To address this need, drafters of the 1945 state constitution included a provision establishing a mill tax, earmarking a portion for state parks. This special provision was approved by voters when they approved the new constitution. Then, in 1960, Missouri voters extended this constitutional provision by a two-to-one majority during a special vote on the mill tax. This special tax for state parks was in effect for 27 years and expired in 1972. When the tax expired in 1972, state park officials implemented a user fee program. These fees were collected for the first few months of 1973; however, due to public opposition the user fee was dropped.

In addition to state monies for park purposes, the system drew from federal sources. The state's receipt of federal funds from the federal revenue sharing program provided a better budget for state parks. Since 1965, the system has sought assistance from the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund to acquire and develop state park lands and facilities. More than half of Missouri's state parks have benefited from the use of the fund.



in the 1950s, camping is one of the most popular activities in state parks today.

Missouri Department of Natural Resources

In 1974, with the reorganization of nearly all state government, the Missouri Department of Natural Resources was created and assumed the state park board's responsibilities for the administration of the state park system. Under the Department of Natural Resources, the park system has continued to expand and improve to meet the needs of all Missourians and visitors to our state.

The size of the system has continued to grow and represent the major natural and cultural heritage themes of Missouri. New facilities have been built and the professionalism of the staff has been improved. Information and interpretation about the parks and historic sites have been expanded as a public service for visitors. This treasury of historic properties and outstanding natural lands is protected through the stewardship of nearly 138,000 acres in more than 80 areas.

As Missouri entered the 1980s, the state's economy declined as the entire nation experienced a recession. This recession led to reduced state revenues and mandatory cuts in the budget for the state park system. At this same time, federal revenue sharing and Land and Water Conservation Funds also were being greatly reduced. In response to this financial crisis, state park officials again proposed the user fee program. Again the idea was dropped because of legislative opposition. The funding shortage remained but in 1982, Missouri voters approved a \$600 million statewide bond issue that included \$55 million for major renovation and construction projects in state parks. It was the largest single building program initiated in Missouri state parks since the earlier work of the Civilian Conservation Corps.

In 1984, Missouri voters again showed their support by approving a sales tax to be used for state parks and soil and water conservation efforts in Missouri. Funds from the one-tenth-of-one-percent sales tax are divided equally between the two programs, both of which are administered by the Missouri Department of Natural Resources. This tax was renewed in 1988 and again in 1996.

With a secure funding base, extensive repair and renovation of the park system can occur as well as the completion of development at newly acquired park areas. Historic structures are being restored, new visitor centers and interpretative exhibits constructed and improved public services provided.

The Missouri state park system is entering a new era. The history of the park system that is being written now will continue to reflect the strong traditions that have developed from years of strong public guidance. The Missouri state park system was developed for Missourians, and reflects an enduring state heritage.



The visitor center at Ozark Caverns in Lake of the Ozarks State Park was constructed in 1986.

For information on state parks and historic sites, call the Missouri Department of Natural Resources toll free at 1-800-334-6946 (voice) or 1-800-379-2419 (Telecommunications Device for the Deaf) or visit our Web site at www.mostateparks.com.

State Park Land Acquisition Summary

Public land donations to Missouri's state park system have been outstanding. More than 60 percent of the acreage in the state park system has been donated to the state. This is a remarkable record and one in which Missouri citizens should take pride.

The following summary is of each site's addition to the Missouri state park system.

YEAR NAME

1923 Arrow Rock State Historic Site	1959 Table Rock State Park	1976 St. Joe State Park and
1924 Bennett Spring State Park	1960 Pomme de Terre State Park	Missouri Mines State Historic Site
1924 Mark Twain State Park and Mark	1960 Wakonda State Park	1976 Jefferson Landing State Historic Site
Twain Birthplace State Historic Site	1960 Boone's Lick State Historic Site	1977 Dillard Mill State Historic Site
1926 Montauk State Park	1960 First Missouri State Capitol	1977 Thomas Hart Benton Home and
1926 Sam A. Baker State Park	State Historic Site	Studio State Historic Site
1927 Meramec State Park	1964 Graham Cave State Park	1978 Ha Ha Tonka State Park
1928 Roaring River State Park	1964 St. Francois State Park	1978 Deutschheim State Historic Site
1932 Big Lake State Park	1964 Watkins Mill State Park and Watkins	1979 Robertsville State Park
1932 Van Meter State Park	Woolen Mill State Historic Site	1980 Prairie State Park
1932 Wallace State Park	1965 Dunklin's Grave State Historic Site	1980 Weston Bend State Park
1932 Washington State Park	1967 Elephant Rocks State Park	1982 Onondaga Cave State Park
1934 Lewis and Clark State Park	1967 Rock Bridge Memorial State Park	1983 Long Branch State Park
1937 Dr. Edmund A. Babler	1967 Bollinger Mill State Historic Site	1983 Scott Joplin House State Historic Site
Memorial State Park	1967 Hunter-Dawson State Historic Site	1984 Grand Gulf State Park
1937 Big Oak Tree State Park	1967 Towosahgy State Historic Site	1984 Osage Village State Historic Site
1937 Pershing State Park	1967 Union Covered Bridge	1987 Katy Trail State Park
1938 Crowder State Park	State Historic Site	1990 Battle of Carthage State Historic Site
1946 Cuivre River State Park	1968 Locust Creek Covered Bridge	1991 Nathan Boone Homestead
1946 Knob Noster State Park	State Historic Site	State Historic Site
1946 Lake of the Ozarks State Park	1968 Sandy Creek Covered Bridge	1991 Taum Sauk Mountain State Park
1952 Thousand Hills State Park	State Historic Site	1992 Big Sugar Creek State Park
1952 Confederate Memorial	1968 Fort Davidson State Historic Site	1992 Iliniwek Village State Historic Site
State Historic Site	1969 Stockton State Park	1997 Route 66 State Park
1952 Gen. John J. Pershing Boyhood	1970 Felix Vallé House State Historic Site	2000 Morris State Park
Home State Historic Site	1970 Jewell Cemetery State Historic Site	2001 State Park at the Confluence
1955 Hawn State Park	1970 Sappington Cemetery	
1955 Johnson's Shut-Ins State Park	State Historic Site	
1956 Lake Wappapello State Park	1973 Finger Lakes State Park	
1957 Trail of Tears State Park	1974 Bothwell Lodge State Historic Site	
1957 Harry S Truman Birthplace	1974 Castlewood State Park	
State Historic Site	1975 Battle of Athens State Historic Site	
1958 Battle of Lexington	1976 Mastodon State Historic Site	
State Historic Site	1976 Harry S Truman State Park	